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## THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE IN TEXAS.<sup>1</sup>

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In its fourfold character of Spanish territory, Mexican province, independent republic, and State of the Union, Texas has a most dramatic history, not the least interesting phase of which is the trace of the African slave trade running dimly through each period of its evolution—even the last, it seems probable. The beginnings of the traffic here take one back to the days when Napoleon, just through juggling with the map of Europe, had begun his weary imprisonment in St. Helena, and Ferdinand VII. was vainly trying to re-establish the shattered authority of Spain over his revolting American subjects.

In Mexico the Spanish cause was staunchly upheld by a strong party of royalists, and as vigorously contested by enthusiastic republicans. During a temporary ascendancy of the latter in 1813, a declaration of independence was issued, and two years later Manuel Herrera was appointed minister to the United States—where he received, of course, no official attention. His government being soon eclipsed by the royalists, he took up his residence in New Orleans, which warmly sympathized with the Mexican rebels, and rallied around him all of his countrymen who had fled from Mexico, as well as a considerable number of adventurous Americans. With these he determined to wrest at least a foothold from the tottering Bourbon empire, and chose that hold to be in Texas. In the fall of 1816, therefore, with some twelve or fifteen small vessels, of the self-styled republics of Mexico, Venezuela, La Plata, and New Granada, he sailed to the island of Galveston and by the authority of his office as plenipotentiary of the Mexican republic, set up a

<sup>1</sup>It may be as well to say at once that the African slave trade never reached any considerable proportions in Texas. That it did not was due in part, no doubt, to the law-abiding character of most of the population; but chiefly, perhaps, to the fact that Texas did not begin her great development until after the activity of the United States and England had given the traffic its death-blow. Such as it was, however, it was interesting, and that is this paper's sole *raison d'être*. The scanty documentary material upon the subject I have gathered from time to time while collecting matter on the Texas revolution.

government, in which Louis de Aury, a Frenchman, sometime commandant-general of the naval forces of New Granada, was appointed governor, commander of the fleet, and judge of the court of admiralty.<sup>1</sup>

This extraordinary combination of powers De Aury wielded with the greatest facility and convenience: as governor of the province, he issued privateering commissions to his flotilla; swept the Gulf for Spanish merchantmen, as commodore of the Mexican navy; and adjudicated the prizes in his own court of admiralty. He plied a brisk business, and among the vessels captured off the coasts of the West Indies were many fully laden slavers. The disposition of these unfortunate cargoes became an urgent problem; for at Galveston there was no need of them, and throughout the rest of Texas, inhabited as it then was, chiefly by Indians, there was no better market. The difficulty was settled by some of De Aury's recruits from the United States, who smuggled the negroes into Louisiana and sold them even in the suburbs of New Orleans. Thus Texas began her novitiate in the traffic as a kind of supply house for Louisiana. Other than human merchandise, too, was introduced in this way; and perhaps there was collusion between De Aury's men and the revenue officers. At any rate, on August 1, 1817, the collector of customs at New Orleans, in a report to the secretary of state, admitted his impotence to remedy "the most shameful violations of the slave act, as well as our revenue laws, . . . by a motley mixture of freebooters and smugglers, at Galveston, under the Mexican flag."<sup>2</sup>

But, when De Aury abandoned the island in the summer of 1817 to join Mina's filibustering expedition against Soto la Marina, and Jean Lafitte pounced upon it for his own headquarters,<sup>3</sup> the smuggling of Africans began in earnest. This remarkable man had already acquired experience and much notoriety as chief of the piratical establishment of Barrataria, on the Island of Grand Terre, some sixty miles west of the Mississippi delta. Beginning his operations there in the early days of Jefferson's embargo against Great Britain and France, he maintained himself for seven years, despite the repeated efforts of the Louisiana government to dislodge

<sup>1</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I 181.

<sup>2</sup>Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, II 36, note 4.

<sup>3</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I 190.

him. And it was not until the aid of the United States was invoked and Commodore Patterson was sent against him in the summer of 1814 with a little fleet of gunboats that the bandits were dispersed.<sup>1</sup> Some of the largest merchants of Louisiana were Lafitte's factors, and his goods were handled almost openly in the streets of New Orleans.<sup>2</sup>

When Lafitte resumed at Galveston, therefore, in 1817, the industry which the United States had interrupted in 1814 and the British investment of New Orleans had entirely crushed in 1815, his old commercial affiliations were revived, and his intimate knowledge of the bays and bayous of the Louisiana coast enabled him to defy the custom officers. Taking the cue from his predecessor, however, he thought it prudent to fortify his establishment with at least the semblance of legitimacy; wherefore the island was again declared a republican province, a full corps of officers was elected, and allegiance vowed to Mexico. Not deterred by the trifling circumstance that no qualified representative of that government was present to administer the oath, citizen Luis Iturribarria swore Governor Louis Derieux, and the rest of the cabinet then took the oath to the governor.<sup>3</sup> A frank avowal of their purpose subsequently made by John Ducoing, their judge of admiralty, was that of "capturing Spanish property under what they called the Mexican flag, but without any idea of aiding the revolution in Mexico, or that of any of the revolted Spanish colonies."<sup>4</sup>

Probably Lafitte took the trouble to procure letters of marque against Spain from one of the infantine Latin republics—possibly from two or three of them—but this, like his government at Galveston, was the merest formality, and practically it mattered little to him and his desperate followers whether the vessels they captured were Spanish or not, so their cargoes were heavy and their guns light. As with De Aury, the bulk of his prizes were intercepted off the West Indies, and a fair proportion of them being slavers, Galveston Island would quickly have assumed in population the appearance of a miniature Guinea coast, had not the buccaneers

<sup>1</sup>Barbé-Marbois, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 414.

<sup>2</sup>*De Bow's Review*, July, 1851.

<sup>3</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I 453.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 455.

manifested considerable ingenuity in hurrying their blacks on to the United States, and by judicious advertising and discriminating canvassing maintained an approximate equilibrium between the demand and the supply.

Probably most of the purchasing in Louisiana was done from agents who transmitted the orders to Galveston and contracted for the delivery of the negroes at specified places. The most popular of these depots were at the mouths of the Sabine, Calcasieu, and Bayou Lafourche, or in some of the numerous inlets of Barrataria Bay. But occasionally careful individuals who preferred to buy only upon personal inspection went to Galveston and selected their negroes, afterwards paying for them upon delivery at one of the sub-depositories.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most successful salesmen of Lafitte's plant were the three Bowie brothers, Resin P., James, and John J. By the account of the last, which there seems little reason to doubt, their profits in this trade from 1818 to 1820 were \$65,000.<sup>2</sup> And when he tells us that the price of negroes at Galveston was a dollar a pound, or an average of a hundred and forty dollars per man, some idea may be obtained of the magnitude of this branch of Lafitte's business. Upon one occasion, says his brother, while James Bowie was convoying alone a lot of slaves through the wilds of Eastern Texas, they escaped from him as he slept and were captured by a wandering band of Comanches. He followed them as far as the head of the Colorado river, but was forced to give up the pursuit there and abandon his property. It is not likely that the unfortunate negroes profited greatly by their change of masters, though the historian Thrall is authority for the statement that in the early days many Indians of Western Texas wore decidedly negroid countenances.<sup>3</sup>

One of Bowie's statements, bearing all the ear-marks of truth, casts an interesting light upon the defectiveness of congressional legislation against the importation of slaves. It will be remembered that the bill which President Jefferson approved on March 2, 1807, to prohibit the slave trade after January 1 of the following year—the earliest date possible under the Constitution—was, like

<sup>1</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I 183-4.

<sup>2</sup>*De Bow's Review*, XIII 381.

<sup>3</sup>Thrall, *Pictorial History of Texas*, 129.

most laws dealing with slavery, the result of a compromise. The committee which reported the bill had a great deal of difficulty in deciding upon the disposition of negroes smuggled in contrary to the law and apprehended by the customs officers. Chairman Early, of Georgia, proposed that they be sold at auction, and likened such treatment to the sale of "demijohns of brandy confiscated under the revenue laws." One of the members recommended that they be freed, and another that they be returned to Africa;<sup>1</sup> but the last proposition being clearly impracticable, and the other two bitterly objectionable to sectional partisans, the committee finally agreed to recommend that the settlement of the question be left to the separate States—which, in effect, of course, was an acceptance of Early's proposal. And so the law was passed. Observe its workings: most of the Southern States, presumably, passed laws authorizing the sale of the captives. And Bowie avers that he often sold his negroes to Louisiana slave companies, who, wishing to validate their titles to them that they might safely ship them up the Mississippi, where a slave brought an average price of \$1000, surrendered them to customs officers who, according to the law, resold them as "imported slaves." The companies always bought them back and received, as informers, a rebate of half their purchase money.<sup>2</sup>

At last, in 1821, Lafitte, grown too bold in his privateering, was compelled by the United States to evacuate Galveston, and with his departure ceased for a dozen years the pernicious traffic which he had maintained. That he was so long left there unmolested was due to the protests of the Spanish minister as often as the United States had threatened action against him. For, though Spain was always the chief sufferer in his depredations, she feared relief which could only come as the result of foreign interference in territory which she claimed as her own.<sup>3</sup>

When the next cargo of Africans was landed at Galveston, a market had been created for them in Texas. For Mexico established her independence in 1821, and confirmed to Stephen F. Austin the grant previously made to his father by the Spanish authorities to settle three hundred families in Texas. So much success attended

<sup>1</sup>*Abridgement of the Debates of Congress, 1806-1807, passim.*

<sup>2</sup>*De Bow's Review, XIII 381.*

<sup>3</sup>Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I 195.

this undertaking that during the five years following 1825 grants were made to a dozen or more individuals, each of whom contracted to settle from two hundred to eight hundred families. And, though none of these *empresarios* save Austin quite fulfilled his contract, the number of immigrants introduced by 1830 reached perhaps 20,000.<sup>1</sup> After that date Mexico became alarmed for her province, and sought to discourage immigration, but despite her efforts the Anglo-American population rapidly increased. But in Mexico, where a system of peonage obtained which allowed employers all the conveniences with none of the attendant disadvantages and odium of slave-holding, sentiment opposed slavery. A decree of the constituent congress, issued July 13, 1824, prohibited the slave trade, domestic or foreign, in the most emphatic terms, and the constitution of Coahuila and Texas, promulgated in 1827, forbade, after six months, the further introduction of slaves into its territory, and provided for the general emancipation of those already in. The Mexicans objected to the name rather than the institution, however, and when immigrants devised the ingenious scheme of converting their blacks into servants indented for life, the Legislature gave the subterfuge legal sanction.<sup>2</sup> And when President Guerrero, in 1829, by virtue of the extraordinary power with which he had been invested issued a decree emancipating the slaves throughout the republic, he made special exception of those in Texas.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, under some name, negro slavery, it may be said, was absolutely essential to the development of Texas. The land was a wilderness upon which single laborers could make but hopelessly little impression, and free labor was not available, even had the colonists possessed the money to pay for it. Moreover, the most fertile soil lay in the bottoms of the Brazos, Colorado, and Trinity—where, to this day, the virulent malaria necessitates almost exclusive use of negro labor—and thus another argument, if such were needed, was furnished for the use of slaves. Even such men as Stephen F. Austin, who were personally opposed to the institution, recognized and bowed to the necessity.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a few of the colonists with

<sup>1</sup>Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, II 76.

<sup>2</sup>Laws and Decrees of Coahuila and Texas, 103.

<sup>3</sup>Political Science Quarterly, XIII 655-656.

neither negroes nor the means to buy them at the current price in the United States succumbed to the temptation of importing the equally efficient but cheaper commodity new from Africa, by way of Cuba. But that this practice was condemned by the bulk of the colonists is evident from a set of resolution passed by the convention which met at San Felipe de Austin in April, 1833, to memorialize the Mexican Congress for the separation of Texas from her overbearing yokefellow, Coahuila. Being informed that a vessel had just arrived in Galveston Bay, "direct from the Island of Cuba, laden with negroes recently from the African coast," the convention resolved that, "we do hold in utter abhorrence all participation, whether direct or indirect, in the African Slave Trade; that we do concur in the general indignation which has been manifested throughout the civilized world against that inhuman and unprincipled traffic; and we do therefore earnestly recommend to our constituents, the good people of Texas, that they will not only abstain from all concern in that abominable traffic, but that they will unite their efforts to prevent the evil from polluting our shores; and will aid and sustain the civil authorities in detecting and punishing any similar attempt for the future." The framers of the resolution expressed a "proud satisfaction in the belief that the late shameful violation of law . . . was perpetrated by transient foreign adventurers," and by way of advertising their abiding disapproval of such commerce, it was ordered that the resolution be published in the *Texas Advocate*, the sole newspaper of Texas, in the press of New Orleans, and in the various papers "throughout the Mexican republic." Their moral "abhorrence," too, was diplomatically deepened by the political conviction that trade of any sort, as they naïvely expressed it, with Cuba, which was a Spanish possession, was treason to Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, within ten months of the issuance of this official protest, three prominent citizens braved public opinion by landing at Galveston a full cargo of blacks that they had obtained from Cuban traders. The story as I have it is from Mr. W. P. Zuber, of Iola, Texas.<sup>2</sup> They found, on reaching Cuba, that the coast was

<sup>1</sup>Clipping from *The Texas Republican*, June, 1835.—Austin Papers.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Zuber is a member of the Texas Veterans' Association, and came to Texas several years prior to the revolution. I have corresponded with all the members of the association—numbering about fifty,—and though most

patrolled by a United States frigate, and adopted an ingenious way of outwitting her commander. Haranguing several hundred negroes through an interpreter, the leader described Texas as a country greatly superior to Cuba, and asked them to go there with him voluntarily. In return for their passage they were to serve him three years, and were then to receive their freedom with the means necessary for supporting themselves. For such as volunteered he paid the dealer, and, after they had duly signed with their marks the contracts of indenture, embarked them, and cleared from Havana with a cargo of free colored emigrants. Thus they could not technically be seized as imported slaves, and proceeded to Texas without molestation. Before landing, however, the partners had their emigrants sign another paper, which abrogated the previous contract, and bound them to serve their masters for ninety-nine years.

It is also said<sup>1</sup> that J. W. Fannin brought a hundred Africans to Texas in 1835. Certain it is that he had a number of slaves, for on November 6, 1835, while engaged in the siege of San Antonio, he wrote to the President of the Convention, at San Felipe, and offered to empower that body "to sell, hypothecate, or otherwise dispose of all my property in Texas, consisting of *thirty-six* negroes now on Caney creek and Brazos river to meet the purchase of" war material.<sup>2</sup>

It was during this period, too, that Monroe Edwards began to import negroes. The only reference which I have found to his operations at this time, however, is contained in a letter from Retson Morris to the Alcalde at Nacogdoches, advancing his claim to two Africans that had been rescued there from a man named Blunt. Morris says that they, "together with 120 more," were left in his

of them remember in a general way that the African slave trade was carried on, I found only six who could give me particular information. It is thought best to withhold the names of those who engaged in this expedition.

<sup>1</sup>By Mr. Zuber and another of my correspondents, B. F. Highsmith, of Utopia, Texas.

<sup>2</sup>Archives of Texas, File 6, No. 559, Diplomatic Correspondence. See, also, Thrall, *Pictorial History of Texas*, 532.

charge by Monroe Edwards, and that they escaped from him during the Mexican invasion of Texas.<sup>1</sup>

The war of the Texas revolution began in the fall of 1835, and on March 2, 1836, became a war of independence. The resulting disorganization of the government, Edwards and others found particularly favorable to the introduction of considerable numbers of slaves, as is shown by a letter dated March 2, 1836, from William S. Fisher, collector for the port of Velasco, to Provisional Governor Henry Smith. He writes: "The schooner Shenandoah entered this port on the 28th ult. and proceeded up the river, without reporting. I immediately pursued her. . . . We overhauled the vessel that night, and found that the negroes had been landed—the negroes were, however, found during the night. The negroes I have given up to Mr. Edwards (the owner) on his giving bond and security to the amount of their value, to be held subject to the decision of the government. Sterling McNeil landed a cargo of negroes (Africans) on the coast. I endeavored to seize the vessel, but was unsuccessful—This traffic in African negroes is increasing daily, and as no law has emanated directly from the Council in relation to this matter, I am very much in need of instruction. The number of negroes landed from the Shenandoah is 171."<sup>2</sup>

This letter was referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs, who refused to recommend any action concerning it, on the ground that "said letter is of such a nature as to involve several important legal questions which your committee do not consider come under the sphere of their duties; inasmuch as the private rights of several of our valued and respected citizens are therein involved. Yet," they continue, "your committee have no hesitancy in reporting their

<sup>1</sup>Retson Morris to George Pollitt, July 26, 1836.—Archives of Texas, File 13, No. 1275, Diplomatic Correspondence.

<sup>2</sup>William S. Fisher to Henry Smith, March 2, 1836.—Archives of Texas, File 6, No. 567, Diplomatic Correspondence. Edwards says (*Life and Adventures of Col. Monroe Edwards*, p. 31) that his cargo numbered 185 when he left Cuba. Edwards had as a silent partner in this expedition a man named Dart, of Natchez, Mississippi. Dart furnished the money for the purchase of the negroes and he and Edwards were to share the profits equally. As we have seen, Edwards retained all the negroes in Texas, pending their sale, and eventually forged Dart's name to a bill of sale conveying the latter's share to himself. Of this and other forgeries he was finally convicted and sent to Sing Sing.—*Life and Adventures of Col. Monroe Edwards*, 36-53.

views and belief of the extreme impolicy of either covertly or indirectly countenancing a traffic which has called forth the indignation of nearly the whole civilized world.”<sup>1</sup>

It seems likely, however, that Fisher’s letter did not pass altogether without effect; for in the first constitution of the republic of Texas, adopted by the convention just a fortnight later, the “importation or admission of Africans or negroes into this republic, excepting from the United States of America, is forever prohibited and declared to be piracy.” The President *ad interim*. David G. Burnet, as soon as possible after the removal of the government to Harrisburg issued a proclamation—on April 3, 1836—calling attention to this constitutional prohibition, and “commanding and requiring all officers, Naval and Military, and all collectors and other Functionaries of the Government, to be vigilant and active in detecting and defeating any attempt to violate said article, and to seize . . . any persons . . . or Vessels, with their equipment, tackle, &c. . . . on board of which any Africans or Negroes, so attempted to be imported may be found.”<sup>2</sup>

After the successful termination of the war with Mexico, Texas naturally entered upon a period of very rapid development and the temptation to import slaves became correspondingly greater. The subject came to the attention of the government again in December, 1836, and Stephen F. Austin, Secretary of State, wrote to William H. Wharton, Minister to the United States, and instructed him to ask the co-operation of that government in crushing the traffic. He said:

“It has lately come to the knowledge of this Gov’t. through the channel of common rumor, sustained by the statements of several persons of known veracity, that extensive projects are in contemplation to introduce African negro slaves into this country by citizens of the United States in a manner that will equally violate the laws of the United States and the constitutional provisions of this Republic on the subject.

“It is intended, as we have been informed, to land said African slaves on the sea shore, east of the Sabine river, or on the east bank of the Sabine within the limits of the United States and then re-

<sup>1</sup>Report of Committee to whom was referred letter of W. S. Fisher.—Archives of Texas, File 6, No. 566, Diplomatic Correspondence.

<sup>2</sup>Telegraph and Texas Register, August 16, 1836.

ship them to this country, and thus attempt to bring such introduction of slaves under that clause of our constitution which admits them from the United States exclusively.

"This attempt to evade the prohibition of the African slave trade, contained in our constitution certainly will not be sustained by the tribunals of this Republic, but it is also desirable that the Gov't. of the United States should be apprised of such attempts to carry on a piratical commerce by her own citizens through her territory and in American vessels."<sup>1</sup>

Whether Wharton ever succeeded in getting this information before the United States government is unknown, but the first Congress of Texas, which was still in session, took up the matter, and enacted that, any person convicted of introducing African negroes from any foreign country, except the United States, should suffer death without benefit of clergy. In order that no technical loophole might be afforded for the evasion of the law, it was at the same time provided that such slaves as were brought from the United States must previously have been legally held there.<sup>2</sup>

This law was passed in the beginning of the first administration of Sam Houston, who displaced President Burnet in October, 1836, but in his message to the special session of Congress, in May, 1837, Houston thought it necessary to again advert to the subject. He said: "It cannot be disbelieved that thousands of Africans have lately been imported to the Island of Cuba, with the design to transport a large portion of them into this Republic. This unholy and cruel traffic has called down the reprobation of the humane and just of all civilized nations. Our abhorrence to it is clearly expressed in our constitution and laws. Nor has it rested alone upon the declaration of our policy, but has long since been a subject of representation to the Government of the United States, our ministers apprising it of every fact which would enable it to devise such means as would prevent either the landing or introduction of Africans into our country.

"The naval force of Texas not being in a situation to be diverted from our immediate defence, will be a sufficient reason why the Government of the United States and England should employ such

<sup>1</sup>Austin to Wharton, December 16, 1836.—Archives of Texas, File 1, No. 66, Diplomatic Correspondence.

<sup>2</sup>Act of December 21, 1836, Gammel's *Laws of Texas*, I 1257-58.

a portion of their forces in the Gulf as will at once arrest the accursed trade, and redeem this Republic from the suspicion of connivance, which would be as detrimental to its character as the practice is repugnant to the feelings of its citizens. Should the traffic continue, the odium cannot rest upon us, but will remain a blot upon the escutcheon of nations who have power, and withhold their hand from the work of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

In consonance with the President's message, General Memucan Hunt, Texan envoy to the United States, was instructed by a dispatch, dated May 25, 1837, to inform the State Department of another scheme to introduce slaves identical with that reported by Austin the preceding December. This he did in a formal note to Secretary Forsyth, on July 18. Mr. Forsyth replied immediately, asking for more definite information: "What grounds has Texas for believing the undertaking is to be attempted? Who are the actors? When and where are the negroes to be landed?" One cannot but applaud the Texan's slightly sarcastic and entirely self-respecting answer that, "the precise time at which it is to be done, and who they are proposing or intending to do this was not communicated" to him, but that "should the government of Texas ascertain where and at what time this or any other company may intend to land negroes from Cuba near Texas, as limited as is her naval force, it is considered as sufficient to make it unnecessary to desire the aid of the United States for so specific a service." He gave it as his opinion that the constant attention of an ample naval force would be necessary to permanently suppress the trade, "for the reason that slaves in Cuba do not sell there generally for more than half what they are worth in the United States."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Forsyth replied to this on July 31, saying that vessels had been ordered by the secretary of the navy to cruise off the mouth of the Sabine, and that a military post would be established on that river.

It does not appear likely that many of these rumored importations ever materialized. I can learn of only three or four that were made during the existence of Texas as a republic—from 1836 to 1845—and the whole number of slaves so introduced was perhaps not more than six or seven hundred, certainly it did not exceed a

<sup>1</sup>Crane, *Life and Select Literary Remains of Sam Houston*, 285-86.

<sup>2</sup>Report of Memucan Hunt to Secretary of State of the Republic of Texas.—Archives of Texas, File 8, No. 726, Diplomatic Correspondence.

thousand. One of these expeditions was conducted by a man named Shepard, of whom nothing else is known. "The people of Texas," says Captain R. M. Potter, U. S. A., a writer well acquainted with early Texas, "though not zealous against the practice, were not in favor of it."<sup>1</sup>

Though there is no available documentary evidence that this desultory traffic continued after annexation, many old Texans remember that Africans were frequently sold in the State, even down to the late fifties. The best authenticated—and perhaps the last tradition of importation during this period occurred in 1856. In the spring of that year the United States War Department began some experiments to test the efficiency of camels as pack-animals for posts on the southwestern frontiers, and a small cargo were landed at Indianola, Texas, for service at Camp Verde, about sixty miles northwest of San Antonio. Shortly after this, another ship appeared at Indianola, claiming to have on board a lot of camels for sale to private individuals; but it is asserted that interested parties were aware that the cargo really consisted of Africans. I have talked with men who claim to have seen some of the negroes that were purchased from this vessel. The camel ruse seems to have been pretty well understood in Texas, and the people probably expected similar ventures to follow; for ex-Governor F. R. Lubbock tells us in his "*Memoirs*" that in 1858 two ships anchored at Galveston under suspicious circumstances, and were at first "thought to be slavers watching for an opportunity of secretly landing their human freight. But they turned out to be laden only with camels; *at least no evidence appeared that they had any African negroes aboard to sell as slaves.*"<sup>2</sup>

The subject threatened to become a platform issue with the democratic party in 1859, as is evident from a circular published by Hon. John H. Reagan, in April of that year.<sup>3</sup> He had learned that an effort was making "to interpolate on our platform of principles declarations in favor of filibustering and the reopening of the slave trade," and that an attempt would be made to defeat him in his candidacy for Congress, on account of his opposition to these two propositions. Defending himself, he said: "In reference to the

<sup>1</sup>*Magazine of American History*, VIII 161-62.

<sup>2</sup>Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas*, 238. The italics are mine.

<sup>3</sup>*Texas Republican*, April 22, 1859.

reopening of the African slave trade, it is simply ridiculous to talk of doing it in the Union, unless it be ascertained that Congress has not authority to legislate on the subject." A resolution recommending a thorough canvassing of the constitutional rights of Congress in regard to slavery legislation really was introduced by G. W. Chilton in the democratic convention held at Houston in May, 1859, but it was overwhelmingly voted down. Nevertheless, the opposition throughout the campaign charged the democrats with the intention of reopening the slave trade, and as a result succeeded in electing their entire ticket with Sam Houston at its head as governor. Thus the question rested in Texas, when secession settled it forever.

Some of the Africans who were brought in during the period of the republic are still living—in fact, along the coast from Matagorda to Velasco and along the banks of the Brazos and Colorado rivers they are not at all uncommon.